

DALLAS TIMES-HERALD (T)
29 July 1980

Bob
Brock

/CBS backing CIA series

A TV SERIES on the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), once proposed and pursued by Dallas broadcaster-entrepreneur Gordon McLendon, will now be produced by a California production company in association with 20th Century-Fox TV. It should turn up on CBS in the 1981-82 season.

In Los Angeles, executive producers Larry Thompson, Don Penny and Ray Wagner — incorporated as Thompson, Penny, Wagner Productions — announced the project, a fictionalized one-hour dramatic series currently titled, "The CIA." Veteran screenwriter Edward Anhalt has been retained to script the initial episode and act as executive script consultant.

The series, according to the producers, will be based on "realistic international incidents drawn on material from declassified historical information." Thompson, Penny and Wagner say they have received the exclusive cooperation of the Association of Former Intelligence Officers, who will provide technical and interpretive assistance.

"The CIA," continue Thompson, Penny and Wagner, "will view international events through the eyes of a CIA case officer involved in all aspects of gathering and processing intelligence for the government. The case officer and his team will be composite characters based on real people." In Dallas, McLendon, who just returned from Hungary where he was executive producer on a new film starring Sylvester Stallone, admitted he was unaware of the latest development concerning a CIA series. However, he said that he and the principals in his proposed TV project had abandoned the idea when "we were never able to satisfy ourselves that we would get the story cooperation that would be necessary to do a series." "We certainly didn't expect the CIA to let us have access to all their files," McLendon noted, "but without plots, what are you going to do?"

McLendon, who first revealed his plans for a series based on the exploits of the CIA over two years ago, also had the cooperation of the Association of Former Intelligence Officers, of which McLendon is a member. McLendon was a Naval intelligence officer in World War II.

McLendon said that CIA Director Stansfield Turner had been most cooperative when he broached him with the idea for a CIA series, similar in format to the popular and long-running "The FBI."

"But, right off the bat, I had a feeling that there would be problems," McLendon said. "Now, I never got any names to attach to this, but I think there were many old-timers with the CIA that just didn't want a series made. Period. Some of them, I think, were being over-zealous."

McLendon said that he certainly didn't believe that all the secrets of the CIA should be laid bare, but he felt that his proposed series could have brought a more positive image to an agency that many view in a negative light.

"It was never my intention to put a nail in the CIA," McLendon continued. "I think that in certain respects the agency has become paranoid because of many of the books written by former agents."

"I still think the CIA series would have been fun to do, but I feel that we would have ended up being compromised in regards to our original intent. I couldn't see the CIA putting their seal of approval on our series, and I don't think you'll find it on the new one that has been proposed."

McLendon, whose business ventures usually keep him bouncing around the world, feels that he'll be more Dallas-bound in months to come.

McLendon will be a daily contributor when KNBN TV, Ch. 33, the new business news station, takes the air in mid-September. In four, 10-minute programs, "Gordon McLendon's World," he will lend his expertise to a discussion of metals, currency and collectibles.

McLendon, in partnership with Clint Murchison and Hollywood producer Sy Weintraub, is also finding activity increasing with their Subscription Television of America (STA).

Although STA recently sold four outlets to Golden West Subscription Television of Los Angeles — including STV for Dallas-Fort Worth, which will be seen nights and weekends on Ch. 33 — the company still has STV franchises of its own in five markets. They are Tampa-St. Petersburg, Fla., Denver, Colo., Indianapolis, Ind., Norfolk, Va., and San Francisco, Calif. The San Francisco subscription operation is scheduled to begin next week.

In addition, STA also still owns the station in Providence, R.I., to which it sold subscription TV rights to Golden West.

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